

Town Potential Site Residence Program

Cohasset, as part of the coastal area of the Department of Mental Health, may potentially become involved in a community residence program to de-institutionalize the psychiatrically disabled and mentally retarded.

According to Ted Lang,

Associate Area Director of the Coastal Area Office, the Department is seeking to de-institutionalize the mentally retarded and psychiatrically disabled clients into community residences established in the service area. These towns — Braintree, Weymouth,

Hingham, Hull, Scituate, Norwell and Cohasset — are generally the original home town of the patients. There are currently no community residences staffed or supported by the Department of Mental Health in Cohasset.

In an information-sharing meeting with Selectmen last week, Lang focused on the psychiatrically disabled adult clients presently living at Medfield State Hospital, and who are deemed ready for placement in a community residential setting.

All of these clients, Lang said, have been in an institutional setting for a year or more; the average length of stay is 10 to 15 years. However, the length of their stay is due more to the unavailability of community-based alternatives, including support programs, than it is to the severity of their disabilities, he said.

Lang stressed that these people are not unpredictable, assaultive or dangerous. The great majority of them are depressed and lethargic and lacking social and work skills. The clients chosen for community residences are to be



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carefully screened and rescreened for their adaptability to live in a community setting.

The residents chosen for community placement will have 24 hour staffing in the residence, in addition to supervised support programs that they will attend throughout the normal work day. Weekend activities and recreation will also be planned and supervised.

Lang said the failed attempts to de-institutionalize

mental health and mental retardation services in other states were caused by a failure to plan well and provide on-going support programs in the community. He emphasized the Department's intention to provide the necessary support programs to these clients.

Lang said the great majority of community-based programs are less expensive than institutionalization, but they don't provide immediate, percept-



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listen to records and talk. He finds the local townspeople "very supportive" of the Camp. Some campers are known around town since they have been coming here for ten years.

Camp Harmony Hill is, in a sense, a de-institutionalized community residence, although it is strictly a recreational, seasonal facility. It's 25 year existence, one suspects, has hardly been noticed by most people in town.

By Karin Bartow

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